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Tuesday 2 February, 2016

**WELCOME NOTE TO PARENTS**

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Dear Parents of the Totara Room (Rooms 21 and 22)

Hello and welcome!

We enjoyed meeting many of you this morning on our first official day back at school for 2016. The children all seem refreshed and excited about the year ahead. Today, we have all begun getting to know each other by carrying out different co-operative games and activities. In this way, we have been able to start discussing and establishing some solid routines, standards and ways of working together collaboratively that are critical for your child's ongoing success as a learner, both now and in future years.

We welcome Lara Fraser to the Totara Room. Lara will be teaching with Helen every Thursday to release Felicity for her school wide leadership in eLearning (IT). Lara will also work regularly in the room to release Helen for her school wide leadership in Mathematics.

Following current collaborative learning approaches now recommended by the Ministry of Education and a highly inspirational visit to several Cantabrian schools by our deputy principals to observe classroom structure setups and teacher facilitation, Royal Oak Primary School is continuing work towards creating 'Innovative Learning Spaces' (ILS) - you may be aware that this method of teaching and learning has been operating successfully in some of our junior classes already over the past few years. As year 5/6 teachers of Rooms 21 and 22 this year, we have already begun working closely together to plan and deliver a collaborative and engaging learning programme that aims to empower our students whilst meeting their individual learning needs.

Cooperative learning, a form of collaboration, is "working together to accomplish shared goals" (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). According to Russian educational psychologist Lev Vygotsky, learning is a social process where everyone learns with and from everyone else. It affords students enormous advantages not available from more traditional classroom teaching settings because they are interacting, sharing knowledge and experiences with others to solve problems and generate new ideas that often exceed what they can achieve by working independently. This is certainly true in the world of work, where our rapidly changing world demands cooperation and collaboration skills of individuals to meet common goals.

In the Totara Room, we aim to teach students the skills that will enable them to work interdependently in positive ways, share resources, provide constructive feedback to one another, challenge each other’s thinking within a safe, rich learning environment whilst continually reflecting on goals they have individually set.

**How we will facilitate ILS in the Totara Room?**

**Reading, Writing and Inquiry**

In the first two weeks of this term, we will be introducing the Totara Room timetable to our students which reflects the ILS structure that we are putting in place. Both classes have been divided into three smaller teaching groups of approximately 20 students each for the purposes of teaching reading, writing and inquiry-based learning. One of us is responsible for planning and delivering either writing or reading for a term, alternating the following term. Between us both, we will regularly ensure that correct coverage of the curriculum is met, whilst making cross-curricular links wherever possible.

During inquiry-based learning, students will be given opportunities to maximise the ability to take responsibility for their own learning through self-management whilst collaborating with others to share prior knowledge, help one another, make connections with the outside world and problem-solve together.

A system of 'Must Do’s' and 'Can Do's' will operate from day one. In fact, we began to introduce these terms late last year in anticipation of this change and the students coped exceedingly well with this sense of individual responsibility. This system will evolve as the year progresses, as children learn to become more and more responsible for setting and completing their own learning tasks.

**Mathematics**

From Week 3, we will be cross-grouping in mathematics according to student ability across both classes. Later in the year we will work towards combining this subject as part of the ILS to enrich learning even further for all our students.

**Digital Citizenship Programme**

Our formal digital citizenship programme, based on the website 'Common Sense Media', will continue to be taught this year, as part of our school-wide initiative to further build critical safety online awareness for students - and indeed the wider school community.

**Music**

Weekly music lessons will continue this year with Megan Flint. Room 21's music slot is 8.50 am to 9.50am every Friday, and Room 22's music slot is every Monday from 11.35am to 12.35pm. Music lessons form a significant part of learning in many ways; by helping students to develop physical and social skills, building patience, boosting self-esteem, introducing children to other cultures as well as increasing mathematical skills. During these times, whilst Room 21 is at music, Room 22 will have their library session, and vice versa.

**Wiki**

As Rooms 21 and 22 will be working collaboratively this year, we will be sharing a combined wikisite. Our wiki page can be accessed as follows:

**www.2016rops-totararoom.wikispaces.com**

As in previous years, each student will also maintain their own wiki page to show their learning goals and progression. Much of our teacher communication to you will also be through this electronic means so please do take the time to check the website regularly.

**Art / Physical Education**

As in previous years, these programmes will run regularly throughout the school year. Lara Fraser will be planning and delivering our weekly art programme whilst both classes will combine for PE lessons wherever possible. Oaks sports sessions will continue to occur weekly also.

**Homework / Spelling**

Homework will commence from week 3, however your child may be given incidental home-learning tasks to complete prior to this time. Spelling and basic facts will continue to form part of the homework requirements. Further information will be provided on the homework structure soon.

Finally, thank you for ensuring that your child has been well-prepared for the start of the school year ahead, and in advance for your continuous valuable support at home to help build success and importantly, enjoyment in your child's learning.

If you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate either of us. We are available:

* before school from 8.30am,
* by email on helenw@rops.school.nz / felicityb@rops.school.nz
* by appointment if you wish to meet with either of us outside teaching hours

We look forward to working with you and your child this year and meeting with you at your child's three-way goal setting conference in week four of this term.

With kindest regards,

Helen Withy, Felicity Boyd and Lara Fraser.